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*General Editor*

*George F. McLean*

# What is Intercultural Philosophy?

Edited by

*William Sweet*

Committee for Intercultural Philosophy

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## CHAPTER XI

# COMPARATIVE PHILOSOPHY OR INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY? THE CASE OF THE RUSSIAN BUDDHOLOGIST THEODOR STCHERBATSKY

*VIKTORIA LYSENKO*

In the Russian language, there are two mutually exclusive proverbs: “Everything is known through comparison” and “Every comparison limps.” The former points to the heuristic value of comparison, the latter makes us aware of its highly subjective character. In terms of heuristic value, it is evident that comparison has a double advantage – it helps to understand the Other but, at the same time, it sheds new light on one’s own situation, and gives the distance that is necessary to assess it from a certain outside perspective. Thus, any intercultural comparison introduces a certain xenological play between one’s own Self-image and an image of the Other. In this respect, it can be just as much a tool of Self-estimation and Self-affirmation, as a tool of Self-criticism and Self-transcendence. In the final analysis, the image of the Other firmly rests upon one’s own culturally constructed Self-image or Self-identity. In the history of comparative philosophy we can see that the constructions of Otherness depend not only on “objective” circumstances – such as the scope of our knowledge of other cultures, and access to documents, texts, or artifacts – but also (and not to a lesser degree), these constructions rest upon the intellectual situation in one’s own culture – problems discussed, methods used – methods that the community of scholars in a particular period esteems as “objective” or “scientific.”

What scholars of the past wrote about other cultures we can now recognize as reflecting culturally-determined interests and quests. Every epoch asks foreign cultures its own questions and gets its own responses, refracted through the prism of these questions. This interdependence between questions and answers is a matter of interest and analysis that is especially important because it helps to show that our pretensions to “objectivity” and our claims to use a “scientific” or “scholarly” approach are also culturally determined, as far as our concepts of what is “objective” and “scientific” evolve along with our historically changing *Zeitgeist*.

Since the comparison of concepts and systems within one particular tradition, Western or Eastern, may also be called comparative philosophy, was the term “intercultural philosophy” coined to refer to

intercultural communication in a wider sense? Does intercultural philosophy necessarily imply making comparisons? Could it not be something like a discourse which takes into account different cultural perspectives – philosophizing in terms of different philosophical traditions? Among the contemporary philosophers who profess the idea of intercultural philosophy (Raul Fornet-Betancourt, Franz Martin Wimmer, Heinz Kimmerle, Ram Adhar Mall, and others), there are persons who have had a multicultural education or experience (here, Western and some other: e.g., Indian, African, Latin-American, etc.). If we understand intercultural philosophy in the sense of a merging of horizons or a combination of different cultural perspectives by those who have a command of different traditions, do we have valid criteria to distinguish it from inculuration<sup>1</sup> or inclusivism<sup>2</sup>?

The main challenge for intercultural philosophy in this sense is to avoid two extremes: 1) rash universalism, with its superficial synthesis of different traditions on the basis of only one particular tradition, namely the Western one, and 2) dogmatic particularism, with its idea of the total incompatibility of cultures and the impossibility of understanding any culture from another cultural perspective. In the final analysis, what is at stake here is whether it is possible for an individual, group, or society to keep intact its cultural identity while accepting other cultural experiences. The example of Buddhism, which was assimilated by different cultures without a loss of its identity, shows that this is quite possible.

If, for intercultural philosophy (in the contemporary sense of the word), a multicultural philosophical experience is an indispensable condition, does the same hold for comparative philosophy? Let us look at some of the historical circumstances which gave birth to it. Starting from the “discovery” of Sanskrit (by Sir William Jones), the appearance of comparative linguistics in the late 18th and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (by F. Schlegel, A. Schlegel, F. Bopp, and A. von Humboldt) marked the beginnings of the development of a number of disciplines like comparative literature studies (Th. Benfey), comparative religion studies (F. Max Müller), and so on. One of the initiators of comparative philosophy, Arthur Schopenhauer, was the first major modern Western thinker who acknowledged the value of philosophical ideas belonging to other cultural traditions – namely, the Indian (e.g., the Upanishads and the Buddha). However Schopenhauer’s use of Indian philosophy makes us suspect that, for him, the fact of its cultural otherness and distance in time did not make any difference. Challenging Hegelian historicism, he claimed that philosophical thought is beyond time and space (later this approach was called *philosophia perennis*): “Hegelians who believe that the history of philosophy has its purpose, are unable to understand the fundamental truth that at all times everything is all the same, all the

formation/becoming and origination/occurrence are illusory, only ideas are eternal, time is ideal.”<sup>3</sup> According to Schopenhauer, the world is constantly changing, but it is not a progressive change; rather, it is a process that has neither beginning nor end nor any particular direction. The will is blind and blows where it wants. Therefore, it is not surprising, from his point of view, that similar ideas relate modern Germany and ancient India. He recognized that his thought was directly influenced by the Upanishads but, as far as his relationship toward Buddhism is concerned, the situation was more complex. Schopenhauer remarked that his philosophy was already formulated when he came to know about Buddhism, so it was rather a matter of expressing the same ideas across time and cultures, than a question of influence.

If I wished to take the results of my philosophy as the standard of truth, I should have to concede to Buddhism pre-eminence over the others. In any case, it must be a pleasure to me to see my doctrine in such close agreement with a religion that the majority of men on earth hold as their own, for this numbers far more followers than any other. And this agreement must be yet the more pleasing to me, inasmuch as in my philosophizing *I have certainly not been under its influence* [emphasis added]. For up till 1818, when my work appeared, there was to be found in Europe only a very few accounts of Buddhism.<sup>4</sup>

However, he claimed that his expression of the truth of this Buddhist insight was more genuine and exact:

Buddha, Eckhardt, and I all teach essentially the same...Eckhardt within the bonds of his Christian mythology. In Buddhism, these ideas are not encumbered by any such mythology, and are thus simple and clear, to the extent that a religion can be clear. Complete clarity lies with me.”<sup>5</sup>

Schopenhauer took Indian thought existentially as having a deep kinship to him, to his own *Weltanschaung*. It was a kind of “selective affinity of souls,” with all its inevitable reductionism, that is a tough selection in which those aspects of other cultures that may come into conflict with this “search for affinity,” and are not noticed or discarded. He did not seek more deep acquaintance with India, never studied Sanskrit or tried to verify his intuitions against the texts, and did not show any interest in Indian literature or Indian history. Finally, he preferred the Latin translation, or, rather, interpretation, of the

Upanishads based on the Persian “Upnekhat” or “Oupnekhat” [Book of the Secret] by Anquetil Duperron, to the translations from the original Sanskrit available in his time.<sup>6</sup> Although he proclaimed Indians (Buddhists and Hindus – above all, Vedantins) as “equals” to himself, this “equality” was quite relative, because it had been fully constructed or imagined according to the principles of his own philosophy.<sup>7</sup>

Schopenhauer’s charismatic discourse attracted enormous interest in “things Indian,” and gave impetus to the development of comparative philosophy, but what could it propose in terms of heuristics or hermeneutics? Was Schopenhauer’s use of Sanskrit terms or notions (e.g., *māyā*, *nirvāṇa*, *dharma*, *ātman*, and so on) to express his own ideas an example of that intercultural philosophizing we are looking for? As much as Schopenhauer regarded Indian ideas and concepts to be nothing but manifestations of his own intuitions, is it not more appropriate to refer to his approach by the term “inclusivism”?

What could be achieved by someone taking as a methodological basis the idea of *philosophia perennis* is exemplified by the comparative philosophy project proposed by Paul Deussen, Schopenhauer’s follower and disciple, the author of the classic text *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Religionen* (“General history of philosophy with special emphasis on religions,” in seven volumes, 1894-1915).<sup>8</sup> Could he be regarded as the first comparative philosopher? His credo was clearly formulated in *Vedanta und Platonismus im Lichte der Kantischen Philosophie*: “In all countries and at all times, in all that is near or far, there is one and the same kind of thing, in front of which stands a single mind which sees. How could it be then, that the thinking mind cannot necessarily achieve the same results everywhere, in India as in Greece, in ancient or recent times, if it is not blinded by the traditions and prejudices, it stands pure and impartial towards nature in its exploration of it?”<sup>9</sup> He believes, then, that since the world is one and the mind exploring it is one, philosophical truth must be necessarily one and the same (i.e., that of Upanishads and Vedanta). All that differs from this single primarily, primordial truth is a result of the corruptive and destructive impact of local traditions and prejudices. For Deussen, there is only one philosophical tradition – that which starts from the Upanishads to Vedanta, through it to Parmenides, Plato, and Kant, and arrives at its culmination in Schopenhauer. The historical discrepancies of this schema (Vedanta was much later than Parmenides and Plato) were of no importance for him. As Vladimir Shokhin remarks: “Deussen “makes both ends meet” when he “vedantized” Kant, projected the “vedantized” Kant onto Vedanta itself, and then “reads” them through Plato.”<sup>10</sup> This project of comparative philosophy manifestly runs counter to the ideas of the historical and cultural determination of the philosophical enterprise and the value of

cultural otherness which are so important for us today. Though Paul Deussen and his compatriot and fellow Indologist Friedrich Max Müller<sup>11</sup> made quite a number of valid comparisons between Indian and European philosophies which could be justly estimated as real contributions, their philosophical framework of comparison is now outdated and superseded by modern comparativist thought. As Wilhelm Halbfass has justly remarked, this framework, while being universalist, still remains quite inclusivistic.<sup>12</sup>

Now let us turn to the Russian scholar Theodor Stcherbatsky and his contribution to both comparative and intercultural philosophy.

The cultural situation in which all the pioneers of comparative disciplines found themselves was more or less the same – in Europe and the USA as well as in Russia, it was Eurocentrism, with its monocivilizational, cultural, and religious ideology which constituted a predominating paradigm of research and reflection. After Hegel, the idea of the impossibility of philosophy outside Western civilization began to constitute the basis of the academic history of philosophy. So, anyone who discovered “philosophy” somewhere else, ran into an impassable dogmatic barrier. This was exactly the case of Theodor Stcherbatsky.

The pioneers of Indian studies displayed a quite restrained interest in Buddhism. For some of them it was either a dissident sect of Brahmanism<sup>13</sup> or a purely practical philosophy, i.e., ethics.<sup>14</sup> The Buddhologists of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Rhys-Davids, Geigers, H. Oldenbourg and others, engaged primarily in the study of the Pāli canon, and readily opposed the ethical teaching of the Buddha to what they called Brahmanical “metaphysics.” Their approach to Buddhism was connected with the principles of the Protestant liberal theology which identified “true religion” with the teachings of its founder, and which regarded all later developments as “corruption” and immersion in superstitions. Another important feature of their approach was the positivist critique of metaphysics, also extremely fashionable at that time.

In the early 20th century, Buddhism was the dominant religion in many countries of South, South-East, and East Asia, but Buddhologists argued that the “true Buddhism” (“the genuine Buddhism of the Buddha himself”) – was not that which Buddhists actually believed in, but that which they, the scholars, discovered in the ancient (as they thought) texts of the Pali canon, which was, above all, the *Buddha's* ethical teaching.

Stcherbatsky wrote about this situation: “Some scholars pick up out of the whole Canon, the Canon containing a wealth of scholasticism, the single utterance from *Mahāvagga* (vi. 31), “Make good actions, do not make bad actions,” and contend that this alone is the genuine Buddhism of Buddha himself. All the remainder is of later origin and

‘church-made.’ Others, like Professor B. Keith, think that Buddha was nothing of a philosopher since we cannot possibly admit ‘reason to prevail in a barbarous age’<sup>15</sup>...”<sup>16</sup> This statement of the respected Indologist Arthur Berriedale Keith (1879–1944) referred to by Stcherbatsky is quite revealing. It shows the state of mind of many Orientalists of that time, that which was later called “Orientalism” by Edward Said.

In contrast to the Anglo-German Buddhological school, the French-Belgian school (Louis de La Vallée-Poussin, Sylvain Levi, Jean Przyluski) brought to the fore the religious aspect of the Buddhist *Mahāyāna* texts, but also denied the presence in them of an independent philosophical system. Stcherbatsky – despite his personal friendship with de La Vallée-Poussin and with whom he attended a seminar of the German professor Hermann Jacobi – strongly criticized his views on Buddhism. According to de La Vallée-Poussin, Buddhism is “a teaching of obscure magic and thaumaturgy coupled with hypnotic practices and simple faith in the immortality of the soul, its blissful survival in paradise.” As Stcherbatsky remarks, “This characteristic the author then seems willing to extend so as to cover a period of above a thousand years, the whole period of Hinayana....That the philosophy of the Canon was not seriously meant, but served only to produce hypnotic states, we are informed on p. 128....We have thus to imagine the Buddha as a magician who did not preach Nirvana, but was engaged in hypnotic exercises during which he uttered some confused thoughts (*idéologie flottante*)”, but never believed in them. He used them as a soporific stuff in order to induce his audience into a state of hypnotic slumber.”<sup>17</sup>

Stcherbatsky was the first among his fellow European Indologists and Buddhologists who saw in Buddhism a full-fledged philosophical system, with a sophisticated logic and theory of knowledge and even a metaphysics. Not only did he come to acknowledge the existence of the original Buddhist philosophy in its own right, but he also believed that the role of philosophy in Buddhism itself was of crucial importance.

There was another aspect which shows Stcherbatsky’s deviation from mainstream Buddhist studies and, in a sense, from the entire humanistic science of his time. “The Queens” of academic research – History and Philology – set the standards of textual criticism, largely preserved to this day: to explore the text meant to ascertain its authorship, the time of composition, to set out the different historical phases of its evolution, to separate the “facts” it describes from “fiction,” and so on. What interested Stcherbatsky in the Sanskrit texts were, above all, the ideas and concepts. Therefore, he was not involved, like the majority of his colleagues, in the obligatory search for the oldest original texts. He preferred to deal with late commentaries which expounded the ideas more fully and convincingly, as well as with the

living tradition, which continued to develop and to deepen the traditional arguments.

Much of what Stcherbatsky wrote about the originality and philosophical importance of Buddhist thought, about Indian and Buddhist logic as an alternative to European logic, and so on, today may seem something obvious, even a banality or a commonplace. But we should not forget that in his time the banality and commonplace consisted in the firm conviction that Indians were an uncivilized backward people, their religion barbaric as well as their manners, they had no systematic thought, and so on. What we now call “Eurocentrism,” was not only a common worldview of the general educated public, but even of the majority of the Orientalists themselves.

How did Stcherbatsky, a linguist and philologist by training, come to the study of Buddhist philosophy? We know that he was fond of modern philosophy (especially the neo-Kantian *one* – he attended the lectures of the Russian Neo-Kantian philosopher Alexander Vvedensky, 1856-1925) and was well aware of its latest developments.<sup>18</sup> When he *became* acquainted with Dharmakīrti’s *Nyāya-biṇḍu* – a quite distinct and lapidary statement of Buddhist logic and epistemology – the “search query” fostered by his classes in modern philosophy served as a helpful device to interpret Buddhist Yogācara texts. Thus, we may suppose that it was a wonderful “recognition” in another tradition of the elements pertaining to one’s own tradition.

Stcherbatsky resorted to Kantian terminology to give “respectability” to the Buddhist ideas and to attract the attention of professional Western philosophers to the original Buddhist philosophy. In collaboration with them, he intended to introduce Buddhism into modern philosophical discourse and into modern philosophical education in order “to make the names of Dignaga and Dharmakīrti as close to us and as near and dear to us as the names of Plato and Aristotle or Kant and Schopenhauer.”<sup>19</sup>

It was to Alexander Vvedensky that he gave the first volume of his *magnum opus* on Dharmakīrti’s *Nyāya-biṇḍu* with Dharmottara’s commentary, entitled *Theory of Knowledge and Logic According to the Doctrine of the Later Buddhists* (1903). This was the first Buddhist epistemological and logical text translated into any European language. However, his hopes that Vvedensky would become interested in Buddhism were cruelly disappointed. Vvedensky was in fact rather outraged: how could Stcherbatsky “dare” to put on the same footing Kant (!) and Dharmakīrti! In the Introduction to the second volume of his *magnum opus*, Stcherbatsky bitterly remarked: “While the hope expressed in the first part that the system of Dharmakīrti should cause the interest not only among the small circle of Indologists, but among historians of philosophy in general, is still not fulfilled, however,

nothing has appeared that would have shaken our confidence in its value. *Superficial judgments, shot from the hip, of persons who did not prove their opinions by a careful study or by thinking through Buddhist teachings, or even by a simple acquaintance with the subject* [italics mine – V.L.], of course, are the least to shake our confidence.”<sup>20</sup>

Stcherbatsky believed that the task of comparative research would be more appropriate to the “specialists” (by which he meant his Russian Neo-Kantian philosopher colleagues), and that is why he, considering himself not a professional philosopher, deliberately avoided Indian-Western parallels in the second volume of his *Theory of Knowledge and Logic*. Besides, he had acknowledged that comparing the Buddhist theory of knowledge with Western systems “puts an edge and solves many of the issues that are just now the subject of dispute among philosophers of different directions. Therefore, any comparison involving the comparative assessment of Indian speculation, cannot avoid subjectivity.”<sup>21</sup>

Stcherbatsky, then, clearly connected the interpretation of other cultural traditions with problems and discussions in the interpreter’s own tradition. For him, the example of such “subjectivity” is Schopenhauer, who claimed that the Indian sages “discovered” the same ideas as he, Schopenhauer, did. The Russian scholar emphasizes the one-sidedness of this “subjective excitement”:

The agreement between the results of Indian and European thinking is easily mistaken for the truth of the position that truth is one, while falsehood is infinitely varied. But as there is hardly a Western system, which would not be *met* in India, *the mere coincidence does not prove anything* (my italics – VL), since it can be referred to by the dualist, monist, skeptic and dogmatist, as well as by the realist and idealist, materialist and spiritualist.

In other words, these coincidences could be interpreted from different points of view, depending on the perspective of the author of this or that comparative initiative.

However, the critical position so clearly stated did not prevent Stcherbatsky, right in the same work, from rendering some Buddhist notions in Kantian terms without any justification or explanation. Was it an inconsistency? In my opinion, it was not, because Stcherbatsky without resorting to the appropriate terms, makes, in fact, a distinction between comparative philosophy (constructing of East-West parallels) and intercultural philosophy. By using Kantian terminology in the translation of the Buddhist epistemological texts, he gives us an example

of intercultural philosophy – thinking in terms of both traditions, which are, in fact, considered as equal and interchangeable.

The most spectacular example of his “intercultural philosophy” may be found in his famous “Indo-European Symposium on the Reality of the External World,” at the end of his first volume of his late work *Buddhist Logic*.<sup>22</sup> It contains the arguments and statements of Vasubandhu, Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, Nāgārjuna, Chandrakīrti and other Buddhists, as well as of Sāṃkhya, Realists (Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika, Mīmāṃsā), from the Indian side, and Heraclitus, Parmenides, Democritus, Epicurus, Lucretius, Spinoza, Descartes, Berkeley, Hegel, Kant, Herbart, Mach, J. Stuart Mill, and E. von Hartmann from the Western side.

What makes this kind of intercultural philosophizing possible? In the second volume of his *Theory of Knowledge and Logic* (1909), the Russian scholar sympathetically refers to a now-forgotten German philosopher, Willy Freytag, the author of the comparative work *Über die Erkenntnistheorie der Inder* (1905): “As correctly noted by Freytag, if anything follows from these coincidences [between the Indian and European systems – *V.L.*] it is the idea that neither accident, nor arbitrariness determine the development of philosophy, but the internal law of human nature, and philosophical issues it solves: under the most different conditions, philosophical thinking leads to the same results.”<sup>23</sup>

By supporting this clearly expressed universalist stance, Stcherbatsky seemed to demonstrate his adherence to the ideas of *philosophia perennis*, *perennial philosophy*. The human mind in different conditions and in different forms continually raises the same questions and reveals the same truths. It can be argued that the Sanskrit term in his translation (for example, the term *sarīrya* [“similarity of forms”]) can be rendered by a Kantian term (in this case – a “schematism of reason”), on the basis that both have the same denotation – a mechanism of consciousness, serving as an intermediary between mind and senses. In this case, what is “perennial” is not a concrete concept, but a problem: the problem of the relationship between senses and reason, which was raised by both Kant and the Buddhists. Thus, for Stcherbatsky, the bases of intercultural philosophy (if he had used this term) would be the universal character of some problems, like the relationship between mind and senses, or the reality of empirical world, or the existence of other minds, and so on.

That does not mean that the Russian Buddhologist was not interested in comparative philosophy proper. In his early work, *Logic in Ancient India*, he compares Indian logic with Aristotelian syllogistic and also proposes a number of parallels (between Carvakas and Epicureans, between Indian and Greek atomists, etc.) which aimed at undermining the view of the “Greek origins” of Indian logic, atomism, and so on.<sup>24</sup> In

his opinion, the external influences were excluded by the very fact that Indian culture “has been much higher than that what could be offered to it [from the Greek part].”<sup>25</sup>

Vladimir Shokhin believes that this paper of Stcherbatsky signaled a Copernican revolution in comparative philosophy: “The real discovery made in this first historical and philosophical essay of Stcherbatsky consisted in that he tried to determine the differences and similarities of Indian logic, with Aristotle’s and with modern European logics. It was a comparison not only of the accomplished results of the two philosophical traditions, but also of the types of rationality, of how actually the carriers of these traditions conceived the process of thinking.”<sup>26</sup>

All Stcherbatsky’s works written after the *Late Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, contain more or less parallels and comparisons, and the final book, *Buddhist Logic* (1930-32) contained a comparative section on almost every topic discussed. Along with these comparative parallels, Stcherbatsky, notwithstanding his failure with Vvedensky, attempted equally unsuccessfully to engage in a dialogue other professional philosophers (Theodor Losev and Bertrand Russell). But even in the absence of real partners, this dialogue still took place – in the mind of Stcherbatsky. Though he did not, for the reasons explained above, always engage himself in comparisons, he continued to think “comparatively” or, rather, “interculturally,” constantly trying to erect bridges between Indian and contemporary Western philosophical thought. As the eminent Russian Sinologist Vasilii Alexeev (1881-1951) said about him: he is one who “firmly holds two worlds in himself.”

Stcherbatsky’s method of translation of Sanskrit philosophical texts can also be called “intercultural” rather than “comparative.” He was the first to notice that the translation of philosophical texts, as compared with other Indian literature, ran into quite special problems:

...the difficulty of their [philosophical texts] translation has increased by the fact that philosophy hasn’t a language of its own and it expresses the concepts it has to operate with, using metaphors. The translator now and then has to deal with the words, well known to him, but referring to some concepts that clearly have nothing in common with the ordinary meanings of these words. Only through a hypothetical reconstruction of the philosophical system in question, can one at the beginning only approximately define the concept, which is metaphorically denoted by such a term. A literal translation would be completely useless as it does not express a thought of the author.<sup>27</sup>

In other words, a word-to-word translation will present the translation of the metaphor, rather than of the term.

Stcherbatsky continues: “We generally tried where possible to penetrate into the thought of the author in its entirety and to express it in Russian as it would be expressed by the author himself, if he could have written in that language.”<sup>28</sup> Here Stcherbatsky refers to the famous Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev who formulated the following requirements for the translation of the Greek classics, especially Plato: “After having mastered the ideas of the original text in their fullness and accuracy of expression, in any particular case, representing some difficulty for the literal translation, it is necessary to put to yourself a question: How would this author – say Plato [one easily can replace Plato by Dharmakīrti or Śaṅkara – *V.L.*], with all the peculiarities of his mind, character, style and way of thinking as we know them from the historical sources – have expressed this thought in all its shades of meaning had he known Russian, and had he written in that language.... It should inseparably present clear signs of its dual origin from the two live sources – the Greek and the Russian languages.”<sup>29</sup>

A good translation, according to Soloviev, is a translation in which a translator so to say platonizes himself – makes Plato think like a Russian thinker – so a good translation of Plato must draw upon the two sources represented by the Greek and the Russian languages. If we replace Plato by Dharmakīrti, the situation of a good translation of the Sanskrit text would be as follows: The Russian translator must make himself Dharmakīrti and make Dharmakīrti think in the spirit of the Russian language. In this text, the dual origins from the Sanskrit and Russian languages must be also present. Is not that the situation of intercultural philosophy?

In the event that we believe intercultural philosophy to be something of this kind, some problematic issues suggest themselves. First, it looks as if Stcherbatsky implicitly believes in the absolute transparency between each other of the input Sanskrit language, and the output Russian language. Thus, neither the philological nor the interpretive methods of translation outlined by Stcherbatsky purport to be a hermeneutical reflection. In spite of the structural Indo-European similarities between Sanskrit and Russian, there are different modes of cultural and historical specification – textual as well as contextual – which should also be taken into account. Moreover, the hermeneutical position of the translator or interpreter him or herself has to be specified or determined in terms of his or her cultural presuppositions and limitations.

Being fully aware of this cultural and historical determination, as I have shown before, Stcherbatsky’s main guide in his philosophical translation was to identify a problem, whereas the languages expressing

it may be different and interchangeable. The historical and cultural dimensions are secondary compared with the number of eternal philosophical problems that may be expressed in different languages, and in different cultures and historical periods.

Those European thinkers who, like Stcherbatsky, believe in a *philosophia perennis* profess a certain understanding of language: according to them, language is merely a docile instrument for the expression of thought. So the main task is to identify this or that idea, considered to be *perennis*; the question of formulating it in different languages is of a secondary order. If Dharmakīrti had come to the same ideas as Kant (time and cultural distance are of no importance), we commit no error in rendering his thought in Kantian categories. But before judging the Russian scholar from the position of modern scholarship, let us remember that his task could be regarded as primarily that of a *Kulturträger* and, from this perspective, his Kantian terminology was a kind of *upāya kaushalya* (skilful means) of introducing Buddhism into European philosophical culture.

Nevertheless, we cannot avoid the fact that it is his “Kantian” translations that were and still are the subject of the most ardent discussion and criticism.<sup>30</sup> Though his contribution to the study of Buddhist and Indian philosophy is widely acknowledged, his philosophical method of translation has evoked a more reserved response. The case of Stcherbatsky makes us aware of the necessity of distinguishing between translation and interpretation. In every translation there are different degrees of interpretation, reflecting different degrees of “otherness” and “selfhoodness.” The regulative idea of the translator is to render the otherness of the other in those terms of one’s own language that were not overloaded by one’s own quite specific cultural connotations. In Stcherbatsky’s Kantian interpretation, the otherness of the Buddhist *pramāṇavāda* almost disappeared out of sight.

As for his attempts at intercultural philosophy, we can clearly see now that Stcherbatsky was not fully aware of the hermeneutical pitfalls and barriers of this enterprise which are now known to us. But still, in spite of its naive and romantic character, his idea of a symposium in which philosophers of different times and cultures are engaged in a dialogue, or, rather, polylog, is quite appealing.

Stcherbatsky’s strategy, as we have seen, was largely determined by his *Kulturträger* task, but, in the final analysis, it could not crash the citadel of Eurocentrism in the minds of Western (Russian) philosophers. That citadel is still there, but this does not mean that the project of intercultural philosophy as such is doomed to failure. It can play the role of a counterweight to the Western model of globalization, provided that it will be taken, not as a veridical propositional discourse, but as a kind

of experimental intellectual enterprise aimed at developing a common ground for the encounter of different cultures *in terms of all these cultures*.

Nevertheless, I believe that the awareness of an irreducible distance between cultures is nowadays an altogether more attractive challenge than the awareness of their similarity. In this perspective, as it seems to me, it is more important to show the difference in seemingly similar ideas, than the similarity in apparently different ideas. So, if comparative philosophy historically began with similarities, now it is time for it to emphasize differences in cultural perspectives. In this respect, it is only on the basis of multicultural education that our modern comparative philosophy can give otherness its proper place and value, and can contribute to the development of intercultural philosophy, based on the equality of different cultural identities. It is only through differentiation and distinction that the true understanding between distinct cultures can be established. This understanding will pave the way for a new kind of unity based on the polyphony of different voices.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Inculturation is a term used in the Roman Catholic Church, to refer to the adaptation, by missionaries, of Church teachings to different non-Christian cultures. Some of them took advantage of their knowledge of local languages and traditions to express Christian ideas and dogmas.

<sup>2</sup> According to W. Halbfass, inclusivism is “a subordinating identification of other teachings with parts or preliminary stages of one’s own religious system, which is thus presented as a superior structure, and an implicit anticipation of competing views” (*Philology and Confrontation: Paul Hacker on Traditional and Modern Vedānta*, ed. Wilhelm Halbfass (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), p. 11).

<sup>3</sup> A. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, tr., E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1969), vol 2, Supplement to the Third Book, Ch. 38 “On History”.

<sup>4</sup> Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, Ch. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Cited in W. Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), p. 114.

<sup>6</sup> As he wrote about *Oupnekhat* in the preface to the first edition of *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1818): “In the whole world there is no study, except that of the originals, so beneficial and so elevating as that of the Oupnekhat. It has been the solace of my life, it will be the solace of my death!” (p. xiii). At the same time, Schopenhauer’s opinion concerning contemporary translations from the Sankrit was rather reserved: “I cannot resist a certain suspicion that our Sanskrit scholars do not understand their texts much better than the higher class of schoolboys their Greek” (Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga and Paralipomena, Short Philosophical Essays*, Vol II. Ch. 16: Some Remarks on Sanskrit

Literature, § 184. Cited in: *The Sacred Books of the East: The Upanishads* (pt.1), tr. F. Max Müller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), p. ix. See: <http://www.naderlibrary.com/lit.parergaschopen.II.16.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Schopenhauer's Indomania has become a topic of many books and papers. See, for example: Robert Cowan. *The Indo-German Identification: Reconciling South Asian Origins and European Destinies, 1765-1885* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010); Douglas T. McGetchin. *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism: Ancient India's Rebirth in Modern Germany* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> The first three volumes were connected with Indian thought; the others were also full of parallels and comparisons between Indian and mostly Western or Christian (Biblical) philosophical traditions.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Deussen, *Vedanta und Platonismus im Lichte der Kantischen Philosophie* (Berlin: A. Unger, 1922), pp. 40-41.

<sup>10</sup> Vladimir Shokhin, *Th. Stcherbatsky and His Comparative Philosophy* (Moscow: Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences, 1998), p. 61.

<sup>11</sup> Like some of the first Indologists, Max Müller was in search of the ancient cradle of all civilizations, which he and certain romantics identified with India. It was in the same vein as the search of the pra-language, pra-religion or Indian and specially Buddhist origins of Christianity in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

<sup>12</sup> Halbfass, *India and Europe*, p. 411.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, "On the Philosophy of the Hindus," *Miscellaneous Essays*. Vol. II (London: Trubner and Co., 1873).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Max Müller's position.

<sup>15</sup> *Buddhist Philosophy*, p. 25. (Stcherbatsky had in mind the book by Arthur Berriedale Keith, *Buddhist Philosophy in India and Ceylon* [Gordon Press, 1923] – V.L.).

<sup>16</sup> Th. Stcherbatsky's review of the book: L. de la Valle Poussin. *Nirvana* [Etudes sur l'Histoire des Religions, No. 5] (Paris, 1925) which appeared in the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 4 (1926), pp. 357-360. Stcherbatsky's name is given as "Sterbatsky."

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 357-358.

<sup>18</sup> At this time, the rector of the St. Petersburg University was M.I. Vladislavlev (1840-1890), who made the first academic translation into Russian of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

<sup>19</sup> T. Stcherbatsky (sometimes transliterated as Stcherbatskoi and Sherbastky), *Teoriya poznaniya i logika po ucheniyu pozdneishikh buddistov* [Theory of Knowledge and Logic According to Later Buddhists], Vol. 2 (Saint Petersburg, 1909), p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Th. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic* (2 vols., Leningrad, 1930-32), vol. 1, p. 536-545.

<sup>23</sup> *Theory of Knowledge and Logic*, Vol. 2, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> Theodor Stcherbatsky, *Logika v drevnei Indii* (Logic in Ancient India) – *Zapiski Vostochnogo Otdelenija Imperatorskogo Russkogo Archeologicheskogo obstchestva*. 1902, tom 17, vypusk 2-3, s.172 (in Russian).

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The differences in both logical traditions were quite shrewdly explained by the difference in main goals: European logic was connected with “formal truth,” while Indian logic aimed at obtaining new valid knowledge about reality. See V. Shokhin, *Theodor Stcherbatsky and His Comparative Philosophy*, p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Th. Stcherbatsky. *Theory of Knowledge and Logic*, vol. 2, 1909; modern edition, 1995, p. 57.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>30</sup> Among the critics of Stcherbatsky’s method we can mention S. Schayer, A. Warder, E. Conze, R. Robinson, A. Tuck, Herbert V. Guenther, and others.